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SUBJECT: A/S SHANNON'S 6/12 MEETING WITH SALVADORAN
AMBASSADOR LEON

Classified By: A/S Thomas A. Shannon for reasons 1.4 (b & d)

11. (C) Summary: On June 12, 2008, WHA A/S Tom Shannon met with Salvadoran Ambassador Rene Leon. Leon requested the meeting to follow-up on themes discussed during the Deputy Secretary's June 3-6 trip to Central America. Leon highlighted that the best strategy for the United States in the run-up to the Salvadoran elections would be not to make any public statements, but instead to send signals of continued U.S. cooperation with El Salvador. End summary.

12. (C) D Trip and Soto Cano: A/S Shannon told Leon that his recent trip to Central America with Deputy Secretary Negroponte was productive, but that he and the Deputy were disappointed about the Government of Honduras's impulsive response to the TACA crash in Tegucigalpa. He added that El Salvador, and other interested countries, should engage Honduras to ensure that the GOH acts thoughtfully when it considers whether to convert Soto Cano, the site of a U.S. airbase, to an international passenger terminal as a reaction to the crash. Shannon noted that Soto Cano is an important resource for the region, highlighting its use to support humanitarian and post-natural disaster operations. Ambassador Leon noted that Honduras's decision should not come at the expense of the United States and should not jeopardize humanitarian missions from Soto Cano, noting U.S. assistance to El Salvador after the 2004 earthquakes. Leon added that TACA is worried about how its business might be affected. He agreed to share our concerns with San Salvador.

13. (C) Signals of U.S.-El Salvador Cooperation: Ambassador Leon was very clear that the best strategy for the United States would be to keep a low rhetorical profile in the run up to the elections, but instead to send signals of U.S.-El Salvador cooperation. He noted that potential actions could include TPS renewal, a POTUS visit, or some sort of social relief assistance. Leon added that the GOES wants to explore ways to ease the social crises through expediting U.S.-El Salvador cooperation programs already in the pipeline, such as the MCC. He suggested that GOES representatives might sit down with the Acting DCM/USAID Mission Director to see if there is any flexibility within the current resources. A/S Shannon explained that the United States is studying TPS renewal, and that the State Department cannot commit to Presidential travel. Regarding additional U.S. assistance, Shannon agreed that the U.S. and El Salvador should think creatively to find solutions, but pointed out that the USG opposes politicizing assistance programs. He added that the USG should hold a meeting in the next weeks to draw up a menu of options of how we might assist El Salvador.

14. (C) Comalapa: A/S Shannon explained that we are pulling people together on the U.S. side to get a better idea of what we want to accomplish with expanding the CSL agreement. Leon warned that we must be careful with the FMLN and proceed with negotiations in a serious manner. He added that the U.S. would best help ARENA in the elections by not stirring up this issue and should consider doing a simple extension that would not require them to go to their legislature.

15. (C) FMLN-FARC Ties: Ambassador Leon urged that State should "follow-up" on the FMLN-FARC linkage. He noted that FMLN candidate Mauricio Funes separates himself from the party when it is politically convenient. Leon acknowledged that the U.S. could not take a stance on the issue, but

suggested that there might be general statements we could make. DAS Madison suggested that the Salvadorans reach out to Costa Rica to discuss FARC involvement in the Central American region. The FARC is not just a Colombia issue and the countries in Central America might work together, approaching FARC involvement in Central America as a regional threat. A/S Shannon recommended that SICA, or another regional body, might issue a statement condemning terrorist activities in the region and signaling their support for Colombia.

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